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C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
20 October 1966

NSA review completed

State Dept. review completed

ARMY review(s) completed.

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Approved For Release 2007/04/02 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001300010061-4

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HIGHLIGHTS

One of the seven South Vietnamese cabinet ministers who had submitted his resignation has been appointed by Premier Ky to serve as acting prime minister while Ky attends the Manila Conference. The status of the other dissident cabinet members remains in doubt and probably will not be resolved until Ky returns from the Philippines sometime next week.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Light, sporadic activity has been reported by US Marines participating in Operation PRAIRIE in northernmost Quang Tri Province (Para. 1). Viet Cong leaders have decided to withdraw all weapons from village guerrillas as a precaution against their defecting to government forces on a large scale with their weapons. (Para. 2).

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Premier Ky designated his civilian deputy premier, one of the dissident cabinet ministers, to act as premier while Ky is in Manila next week (Paras. 1-5). A special national congress of the Buddhist church is scheduled to convene on 21 October (Para. 6).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

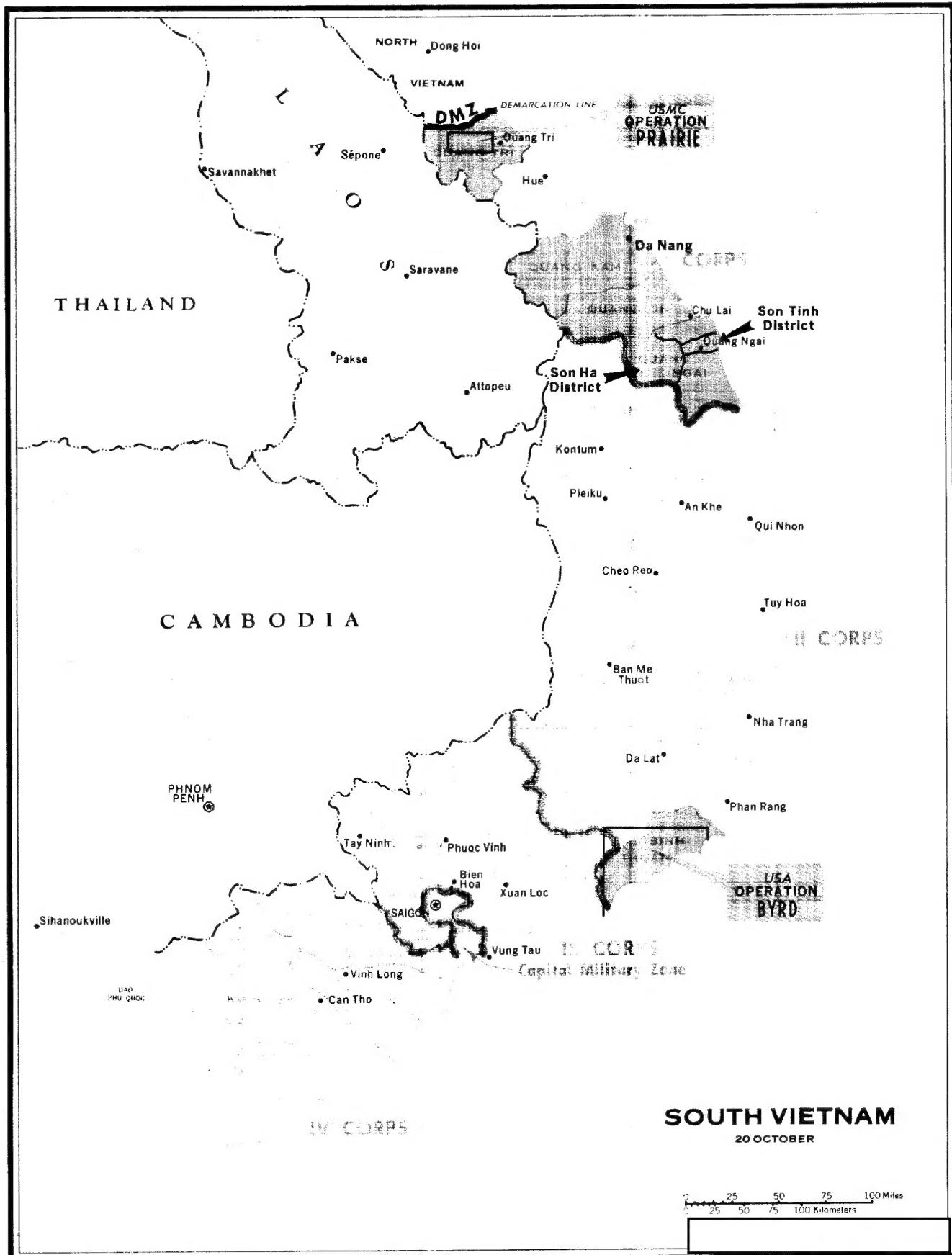
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VI. Other Major Aspects: Reported shortages of POL in North Vietnam are apparently due to distribution difficulties (Paras. 1-4). Prospects for the 1966 rice crop in the DRV are poorer than in previous years (Paras. 5-6).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Although heavy monsoon rains are slowing military activity in northernmost Quang Tri Province, US Marines participating in Operation PRAIRIE reported light, sporadic contact with North Vietnamese Army soldiers of the 324B Division just south of the DMZ on 20 October. Also on 20 October, two battalions of US Marines were deployed to the southwestern part of the operational area to join with South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) forces which are conducting search-and-destroy operations against a Communist buildup reportedly taking place there.

Viet Cong Problems in Binh Thuan Province

2. An order to withdraw all weapons from village guerrillas in coastal Binh Thuan Province until the end of this year has been promulgated by Viet Cong leaders, [redacted]

[redacted] Recent US military activity-- probably US Operation BYRD--conducted by one battalion of the US 1st Air Cavalry Division in Binh Thuan Province--has reportedly demoralized the village guerrillas and there was concern that they would attempt to rally to the GVN with their weapons. The guerrillas also have been prohibited from wearing their distinctive rubber sandals in order to disguise themselves more easily.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Premier Ky, attempting to maintain a semblance of unity in his cabinet, told reporters at a half-hour press conference on the morning of 20 October that civilian Deputy Premier Nguyen Luu Vien, one of the dissident ministers, would act as premier while Ky attends the Manila Conference. Ky presented a general outline of South Vietnam's role at the summit conference which opens Monday. He did not name the delegates who will accompany him nor did he discuss the cabinet crisis.

2. According to the US Embassy, three of the dissident cabinet members, Economy Minister Thanh, Education Secretary Truong, and Social Welfare Secretary Lieng, were absent from the meeting. [redacted]

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3. Press accounts of which ministers were still in the government on the 20th were contradictory, probably an indication that even the seven ministers, who have been in contact with the press, are themselves still undecided. The final shake-up in the cabinet will probably not be clarified until Ky returns from Manila in the middle of next week. It appears now that two of the ministers, Hung (Labor) and Thuan (Transportation), might stay on and that the other five will leave the government.

4. According to one press release, the Saigon University Students Union held a press conference protesting the arrest of the Health Secretariat official three weeks ago by police director Loan,

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the act which precipitated the current crisis. The students reportedly charged that the arrest is evidence of a "police state regime," echoing similar charges by the southern-oriented ministers who are in the midst of the controversy over alleged northern military influence in the government.

5. This is the first overt sign that the so-called cabinet crisis is more than a topic of conversation outside the government. Members of the Constituent Assembly and of the Peoples-Army Council have reportedly been gravitating toward either the northern or southern factions involved in the crisis. If the crisis continues unresolved over the next few weeks, it could have serious repercussions in the larger government offices as well as among other organizations outside the government.

National Buddhist Congress to Convene on 21 October

6. The extraordinary national congress of the Unified Buddhist Association is scheduled to open on 21 October in Saigon. The need for the congress reflects the disorganization within the Buddhist Institute following the unsuccessful antigovernment struggle movement last spring. The council of the Institute resigned last week at a special meeting and will presumably be replaced by a new steering committee chosen at the congress. Decisions made during the congress should reflect a test of strength between the Tri Quang militants, who favor the congress, and the moderate Thich Tam Chau, whose job as chairman of the Institute is at stake. It is possible that Tam Chau will be replaced. The supreme patriarch of the Buddhist church, who convened the congress, is thought to follow the decisions of Tri Quang.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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